**Submission of information for Report on freedom of expression and the gender dimensions of disinformation**

**Submitting organisation: Syrian Female Journalists Network**

1. **Conceptual issues**
   * What do you consider to be ‘gendered disinformation’?

Gendered disinformation' refers to the spread of false or misleading information that specifically targets or affects individuals based on their gender or reinforces harmful gender stereotypes. It involves the deliberate dissemination of disinformation, misinformation, or misleading content that aims to manipulate perceptions, beliefs, or behaviours related to gender.For example it can include false narratives about women's abilities, roles, or experiences, as well as stereotypes or derogatory depictions of marginalised genders.

* + How is ‘gendered disinformation’ similar to or different from online gender-based violence?

Gender disinformation and online gender-based violence are related phenomena that both involve harmful actions towards individuals based on their gender, there are notable differences between them:

* **Nature of Content:** Gendered disinformation primarily focuses on spreading false or misleading information and stereotypes about gender-related topics, while online gender-based violence encompasses various forms of abusive behaviour, including threats, harassment, and intimidation.
* **Intent:** Gendered disinformation aims to manipulate or shape public opinion, reinforce gender biases, or undermine progress towards gender equality. Online gender-based violence, however, focuses on targeting individuals and inflicting harm or fear through abusive/ violent behaviour.
* **Medium of Expression:** Gendered disinformation can occur through various mediums, including social media, online forums, news articles, or even private conversations. Online gender-based violence pertains to harmful behaviour that occurs in digital spaces, such as social media platforms, messaging apps, or online gaming environments.
* **Targets:** Gendered disinformation can target a broader audience, influencing societal perceptions and beliefs about gender. Online gender-based violence specifically targets individuals based on their gender, often with a focus on women and marginalised genders.

**Both gendered disinformation and online gender-based violence contribute to the perpetuation of harmful gender norms, discrimination, and inequalities.**

1. **Responses of States, companies and organisations**
   * What measures have States, digital companies or international organisations taken to combat ‘gendered disinformation’?

* **Policy and Legislation:** Some countries have introduced or strengthened legislation to address online disinformation and hate speech, including measures specifically targeting gendered disinformation. These laws aim to hold individuals or platforms accountable for spreading harmful content based on gender and provide avenues for reporting and legal action.
* **Awareness Campaigns and Education:** Governments, civil society organisations, and international bodies have launched awareness campaigns to educate the public about the dangers of gendered disinformation, its impact on society, and ways to identify and counter false or harmful narratives. These campaigns often emphasise media literacy, critical thinking, and digital literacy skills.
* **Content Moderation and Platform Policies:** Digital companies and social media platforms have implemented policies and guidelines to combat the spread of gendered disinformation. They have strengthened content moderation practices, increased advertising and political content transparency, and improved reporting mechanisms for users to flag inappropriate or misleading content. (still not very efficient and/or relevant when it comes to Arabic language or dialects).
* **Partnerships and Collaborations:** Governments, international organisations, civil society groups, and tech companies increasingly collaborate to address gendered disinformation. They work together to develop strategies, share best practices, and coordinate efforts to combat the spread of false or harmful information, often through media literacy, fact-checking, and responsible digital citizenship initiatives.
* **Research and Data Analysis:** Researchers and organisations are conducting studies better to understand the extent and impact of gendered disinformation. This research helps identify trends, develop effective countermeasures, and raise awareness about the consequences of gendered disinformation.
* **Digital Literacy and Empowerment Programs:** Various initiatives aim to empower individuals, especially women and marginalised communities, with digital literacy skills and tools to navigate online spaces safely. These programs provide critical thinking, fact-checking, online security, and responsible digital engagement training.
* **International Conventions and Guidelines:** International organisations, such as the United Nations, have developed conventions, guidelines, and frameworks to address gender-based violence, discrimination, and disinformation. These documents provide a foundation for member states to develop and implement policies and strategies to combat gendered disinformation.

However, when talking about Syria, the context is different as there’s no laws or regulations for digital space in the opposition-held areas, and in regime-held areas the digital crime law is used to violate freedom of expression rights and persecute activists and journalists.

* + To what extent do these responses comply with international human rights law standards, in particular freedom of expression?

Responses to gendered disinformation must be guided by human rights principles and adhere to international human rights law standards, particularly freedom of expression. This approach ensures a balanced, rights-respecting approach to combating harmful content while upholding individuals' fundamental rights.

* + How effective have these measures been in addressing ‘gendered disinformation’?

It is important to note that eradicating gendered disinformation may be difficult due to the complex nature of online information ecosystems. Success in combating gendered disinformation will depend on a comprehensive approach that combines legal, technological, educational, and societal efforts. Continuous evaluation, collaboration, and innovation are vital to assess the effectiveness of measures and adapt strategies to keep pace with the evolving nature of gendered disinformation.

The effectiveness of measures to address gendered disinformation can vary and is an ongoing challenge. While progress has been made in recognizing and combating gendered disinformation, it is essential to note that the issue is complex and evolving.

* + Please provide references / links to legal or policy frameworks developed to address the gender dimensions of disinformation.
  + Please provide references / links to relevant case law concerning this topic.

1. **Finding solutions**
   * What recommendations do you think the Special Rapporteur should make and to whom on combating gendered disinformation?

Any recommendations must be context-specific, adaptable, and respectful of international human rights standards, including freedom of expression and non-discrimination. To implement these recommendations effectively, the Special Rapporteur should target relevant stakeholders, including governments, digital companies, civil society organisations, and international bodies.

* Strengthen Legal Frameworks: Encourage states to develop and enforce comprehensive legal frameworks that explicitly address gendered disinformation. These frameworks should balance protecting freedom of expression and combating harmful content, ensuring non-discrimination and promoting gender equality.
* Enhance Collaboration and Partnerships: Encourage collaboration between governments, civil society organisations, tech companies, and international bodies to develop coordinated strategies. Establish knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, and best practice exchange platforms to combat gendered disinformation effectively.
* Support Research and Data Collection: Promote research on the impact of gendered disinformation, its underlying causes, and effective countermeasures. Encourage collecting gender-disaggregated data to understand better the specific challenges marginalised genders face.
* Strengthen Content Moderation Policies: Advocate for digital platforms to strengthen content moderation policies and practices, ensuring transparent guidelines, consistent enforcement, and accountability. Platforms should develop mechanisms to address gendered disinformation effectively while upholding freedom of expression and avoiding biases.
* Protect Whistleblowers and Journalists: Highlight the importance of protecting whistleblowers and journalists who expose or report on gendered disinformation. Encourage legal frameworks and policies that safeguard their rights, provide safe reporting channels, and facilitate investigative journalism in this domain.
* Foster International Cooperation: Encourage international cooperation and information sharing to address cross-border challenges related to gendered disinformation. Promote the exchange of best practices, experiences, and resources among countries and international organisations.
* Raise Public Awareness: Advocate for public awareness campaigns that specifically address the gender dimensions of disinformation. Promote media campaigns, workshops, and community engagement initiatives to educate the public about the impact of gendered disinformation and empower individuals to combat it.
  + What issues or areas of gendered disinformation require further research in your opinion?

Intersectionality: Gendered disinformation intersects with various social identities and experiences. Further research is needed to explore how gendered disinformation affects marginalised groups, including refugee/ displaced women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities. Understanding the specific challenges these groups face can help develop targeted responses.

Impact on Political Participation: Investigate the impact of gendered disinformation on political participation and representation. This includes examining how disinformation campaigns targeting women in politics or feminist movements can undermine their participation and how gendered disinformation affects public opinion and electoral outcomes.

Online Harassment and Gendered Disinformation: Explore the relationship between gendered disinformation and online harassment. Investigate how disinformation campaigns contribute to the proliferation of online gender-based violence and how they are interconnected.

Countermeasures and Effectiveness: Assess the effectiveness of various countermeasures and interventions in combating gendered disinformation. This includes evaluating the impact of media discourse, content moderation policies, fact-checking initiatives, and legal frameworks in addressing the spread and impact of gendered disinformation.

Amplification and Algorithms: Investigate the role of social media algorithms in amplifying and disseminating gendered disinformation. Analyse how algorithms contribute to the targeting and engaging specific audiences with harmful gender narratives, and explore potential interventions to mitigate their impact.

Long-Term Impacts: Study the long-term impacts of gendered disinformation on society, including its influence on attitudes, behaviours, and social norms related to gender equality, gender-based violence, and women's rights. Explore how these impacts extend beyond the online realm and affect offline dynamics.

Role of Tech Companies: Investigate the responsibilities and practices of tech companies in addressing gendered disinformation. Assess the efficacy of their content moderation policies, transparency measures, and accountability mechanisms in tackling the spread of harmful gender narratives.

* + Please provide references or links to relevant research or reports.

From SFJN production:

* DIGITAL SAFETY IS A RIGHT: Syrian Women Journalists and Human Rights Defenders in the Digital Space: Risks and Threats

<https://media.sfjn.org/en/digital-safety-is-a-right/>

* To Be Taken Seriously:

About the impact of media coverage on women political participation

<https://media.sfjn.org/media_and_women-politicians/>